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# The Influence Fallacy: Resident Motivations for Participation in an English Housing Regeneration Project

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored resident motivations for participation in a housing regeneration project involving demolition. Findings from 19 semi-structured qualitative interviews are drawn upon to argue that resident motivations for participation have previously been oversimplified to focus primarily on the desire to influence a project, without regard for the way local contexts shape motivations. The article concludes that engagement in housing regeneration projects can also be motivated by seeking information narrowly focussed upon the future of one's home, in addition to identities, emotional factors, and a sense that it is residents' responsibility to participate.

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## Introduction

There has been a trend toward public participation in governance across a range of policy fields and countries in recent decades (Head, 2007). In the UK, the New Labour government of 1997–2010 saw resident involvement, in addition to partnership working, as a key part of its wider governance agenda which sought to achieve radical reform of public services (Taylor, 2007). For many Western democracies, participation has a long-standing association with urban policy (Bennett, 2009; Dekker, 2007; Foley & Martin, 2000; Hall & Hickman, 2011). Participation may be justified as a method of ensuring civil rights (Burton, Goodlad, & Croft, 2006), achieving legitimacy for decisions (Burton, 2009), improving “managerial efficiency” by using local knowledge (Burton et al., 2006), advancing participants' individual development (Barnes, Newman, & Sullivan, 2007; Burton et al., 2006), and contributing to communities' wider social development (Alcock, 2004; Burton et al., 2006).

The public participation policy discourse has been criticised because it ignores the potential for individuals to exercise illegitimate power (Cooke & Kothari, 2001), presents the ‘community’ as a homogeneous and conflict-free entity (Barnes et al., 2007), and in practice results in a prioritising of legitimacy and efficiency gains in favour of wider developmental benefits (Alcock, 2004; Dinham, 2005). One of the most frequent and reoccurring critiques is that the power devolved to residents for decision-making is often superficial and insufficient to allow genuine influence (Teernstra & Pinkster, 2015; Wright, Parry, Mathers, Jones, & Orford, 2006). England's Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder programme (2003–2011), which was criticised for its top-down approach (National Audit Office [NAO], 2007), is a case in point. Community representatives were not present on Pathfinder boards (Cole, 2012) and critics of the programme have argued that the lack of resident involvement opportunities and participants'

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insufficient power allowed the pathfinders to seek to break up working-class communities and gentrify areas of housing market weakness (Allen, 2008; Webb, 2010).

These 'insufficient power' criticisms imply that residents are willing and able to participate if given the opportunity and that their dominant motivation for involvement in projects is to influence plans to achieve a substantive benefit, either for themselves or their community (Samuelson et al., 2005). The perception of citizens as keenly anticipating the opportunity to engage and shape their local area has also been espoused by policymakers and politicians (Department for Communities & Local Government [DCLG], 2012; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister [ODPM], 2005). The UK's Big Society policy discourse, which has focussed on devolving power to civil society and encouraging volunteering and social action, is built upon this notion (Cabinet Office, 2010; Cameron, 2011).

This article challenges the perception that influence is necessarily the overriding motivation for participation, arguing that this view fails to engage with the local and historical social contexts in which opportunities for engagement arise. Drawing on data from 19 semi-structured interviews with residents of a housing regeneration project in England, the paper presents evidence for an 'influence fallacy' in current thinking regarding public participation, which can reduce motivations to participate to a single overarching factor without recognising the setting and the backgrounds of the players involved. Whilst influence is shown to be a motivation for some participants, the research demonstrates that, because of contextual factors, residents can continue to participate whilst actively believing that their involvement will make little difference. Drawing upon social movement theory, the findings show how some residents' desire to learn more about proposals, their perceived responsibilities as residents, the identities they develop, and emotional factors can be more prominent in influencing engagement than the perceived efficacy of participation opportunities. It is argued that efforts to demonstrate the extent to which engagement channels have the power to affect plans may generate involvement from some residents, but that planners and regeneration officers need to consider the wider institutional and social context in which these opportunities are offered.

### Participation, Empowerment and Social Movement Theory

Resident participation in regeneration projects is emphasised in many Western democracies. The UK's Community Development Projects and New Deal for Communities (NDC) programmes (Foley & Martin, 2000), the US Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere (HOPE) VI programme (Bennett, 2009), France's *Habitat et vie sociale* and *Loi solidarité et renouvellement urbaine* (Hall & Hickman, 2011), and the Dutch Big Cities Policy (Dekker, 2007) have all expressed the importance of resident involvement in the regeneration of deprived areas. In the UK a new national estates programme which seeks to demolish and transform up to 100 social housing estates, stresses the active involvement of communities and local resident support for projects (DCLG, 2016a). The co-chair of the Expert Advisory Panel has stated that projects need to be "locally led" and has encouraged communities to propose innovative ideas (DCLG, 2016b).

Before considering resident motivations for engagement it is helpful to reflect upon differing conceptualisations of participation as either based around notions of consumerism or citizenship and their relationship with empowerment. In the consumerist interpretation, public participation comprises the introduction of market mechanisms into the public sphere to make professionals more responsive to service users (Cairncross, Clapham, & Goodlad, 1997). This remodels the service user as a customer who can exercise influence over issues which affect them through individual engagement with professionals. This rests on residents possessing the optional right to voice concerns over the

service they are receiving, and if still dissatisfied, to choose an alternative provider (Barnes et al., 2007). This conceptualisation has been central to the 'new public management' modernisation in services which first developed in the 1980s after the emergence of criticisms of previously trusted welfare organisations (Allen, 2003; Bovaird & Löffler, 2003). This approach is heavily associated with efforts to improve public sector performance through the accountability generated by service users, rather than achieving civil renewal and genuine empowerment (Barnes, Newman, & Sullivan, 2004; Burns, Hambleton, & Hoggett, 1994).

In the citizenship model, public participation is an attempt to empower service users by allowing them to organise and negotiate with professionals and other residents in a deliberative manner over a service's management and policies, considering other citizens as well as their own self-interest (Cairncross et al., 1997). This might be exemplified by tenants' and residents' associations (TRAs), citizen juries using random selection, or boards of formally elected resident representatives. This conceptualisation of participation is associated with social development and local capacity building and rests upon notions of obligations rather than optional consumer rights (Barnes et al., 2004; Burns et al., 1994).

This dichotomy arguably represents an oversimplification of actual approaches to participation by both services and participants (Hickman, 2006). It is also questionable as to whether these conceptualisations are necessarily mutually exclusive. For example, participating service users may communicate others' concerns when engaging on an individual basis or act in an exclusively consumerist orientation when involved in more deliberative arenas. The New Labour government in the UK arguably attempted to marry the notions together in its efforts to deliver both radical service reform and democratic renewal as a part of its wider governance agenda (Taylor, 2007). Furthermore, even participation strategies which draw on the citizenship conceptualisation with ostensibly deliberative spaces for negotiation may not achieve empowerment of citizens if legitimacy is the overriding concern of the service provider. This is especially likely when external targets and competitive funding rules incentivise the disempowerment and incorporation of local people into pre-defined objectives (Jones, 2003; Wright et al., 2006). Lepofsky and Fraser (2003) argue that citizenship has become more flexible, shifting from a given status to one based on performative acts, which non-local actors such as academics, politicians, activists and representatives of charities and businesses become best placed to take up. Residents potentially become either "durable citizens", who can participate in the development of a community but cannot shape the spaces for engagement; or "non-citizens" who avoid or resist participation opportunities (Lepofsky & Fraser, 2003, p. 133). Despite differing perspectives, the concepts of consumerism and citizenship are useful analytical tools for understanding the participation of residents in this study.

It is also helpful to explore participation through the lens of social movement theory, which explores the processes of collective action which arise through shared dissatisfaction with an aspect of the status quo (Barnes et al., 2007). Challenges to the existing situation may not only seek to deliver substantive change in relation to the specific topic of focus for the movement. They may also seek to alter the democratic processes within the "invited spaces" provided by prevailing power structures, which contrast with organic "popular spaces" (Cornwall, 2004, p. 1–2). Barnes et al. (2004) argue that rules and norms are developed by local actors which govern access, agenda setting and the deliberative process which facilitate and/or constrain participation. The topics discussed, the players present and their conduct are determined by the officials and participants. Barnes et al. (2004) argue that 'the public' which is either engaging or is sought is thus a constituted concept, influenced by the social context and framed by notions of representation and representativeness to demonstrate legitimacy.

For Fraser (1997), such arenas make the Habermasian mistake of asserting that a single, comprehensive public sphere is preferable to multiple publics, which is hobbled by the tendency for dominant

groups to disadvantage subordinate members due to pre-existing social inequalities. She argues that this has previously resulted in the development of “subaltern counterpublics” by disempowered groups, which are defined as:

parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs. (Fraser, 1997, p. 81)

The alternative arenas developed by social movements challenge the assumptions and norms operating within the official public sphere. The objectives of social movements may ostensibly consist of specific changes to existing policy to improve the material circumstances of a group, but may also seek to achieve wider cultural change in relation to a topic or population (Barnes et al., 2007). The co-construction of counter-publics can provide participants with a sense of empowerment and legitimation in the face of public spheres they perceive as refusing to afford them the recognition they desire.

Central to the exploration of social movements are the processes by which shared identities are developed among participants which contrast with those displayed or used by the existing power structures they seek to challenge. Bradley (2012) identified three ‘collective identity frames’ which underpin the construction of common cause among participating social housing tenants. Tenants expressed support for social housing which they associated with mutual aid, co-operation and social interaction in contrast to government policies for home ownership, which they blamed for processes of individualisation. Tenants were framed as possessing superior expertise to housing professionals and direct democracy was considered preferable to representation on the governing boards of housing organisations. These collective identities oriented participants toward devolution of power from landlords and against both the market and government policy (Bradley, 2012).

### Resident Motivations for Participation

Not all residents within a local area will be equally likely to participate in the opportunities presented to them. Using aggregated data from eight European countries, Gaskin and Smith (1997) found that the tendency to volunteer increased with education level, social grade, type of occupation and income. Overall the data also showed that frequency of volunteering increased with age. In the East Manchester regeneration project, Blakeley and Evans (2009) found that engaged individuals were mostly white and working class, with women more frequently involved than men, and young people largely absent.

In addition to varying socio-economic profiles, participants will also have different motivations for engagement. Critiques of resident participation have often lamented the ostensibly insufficient power devolved to residents for decision-making which they argue does not allow genuine influence (Teernstra & Pinkster, 2015; Wright et al., 2006). From this perspective the dominant explanation for low levels of resident involvement is the superficially developed opportunities for engagement. Lawson and Pearson (2012) have argued that the reason that community involvement in NDCs was low and fell across the lifetime of the programme was the result of increased government control, more prosaic processes taking place as projects progressed, and overestimations about the ability to achieve substantial improvements. Similarly, Foley and Martin (2000) have commented that “many communities ... will continue to be reluctant to work with local authorities and other service providers because they believe that there is no benefit to them in ‘collaborating’” (p. 486), whilst Innes and Booher (2004) have claimed that discouragement is due to involvement strategies which do not appear to allow them sufficient influence.

The ‘influence motive’ has also been expressed in policy discourses. The UK government has argued that the exclusion of residents from planning processes in the past has been due to their unnecessary

complexity and the imposition of targets and decisions by remote and unaccountable bodies (DCLG, 2012). Previous guidance has stated that “when they feel they are making a difference, people, including those from hard to reach groups, are keen to be involved in planning their own environments” (ODPM, 2005, p. 52). The view that citizens keenly anticipate the opportunity to engage and shape their local area is also implied within the UK’s Big Society policy discourse (Cameron, 2011). The influence motive perspective holds that residents decide whether to participate using an instrumental rationale based on efficacy, rationally weighing up whether they think they can successfully influence regeneration plans through the opportunities available. The benefits residents wish to achieve by influencing a project can be limited to themselves, and consistent with the consumerist view of participation, and/or be motivated by a desire to improve the community, based on the citizenship conceptualisation of engagement (Simmons & Birchall, 2005).

Some quantitative studies have produced supportive evidence for the importance of perceived influence. However, such studies have arguably included relatively few predictors in their model (Höppner, Frick, & Buchecker, 2008), or modelled the relationship with previous participation, rather than willingness to participate, leaving open the possibility that the reverse relationship exists (Grimsley, Hickman, Lawless, Manning, & Wilson, 2005; Marquart-Pyatt & Petrzalka, 2008).

The influence motive has faced some challenges from studies which present more nuanced explanations for why people participate, which are connected to the local social context. Ethnographic research into resident (non-)participation in an NDC by Mathers, Parry, and Jones (2008) has demonstrated that lack of influence is not necessarily the overriding deterrent. The study showed how the wider perceived costs potentially associated with involvement can be shaped by the view that regeneration schemes are another arm of the (threatening) state. Such deterrents were found to include being judged an unfit mother, one’s child being placed on a risk register or being taken into care, discontinuation of benefit payments due to revelations about cash-in-hand work and the application of criminal sanctions because of illegal activity.

The motivations identified by Mathers et al. (2008) are arguably only applicable to a small number of residents. In addition, it is necessary to consider motivations outside of the instrumental, cost-benefit approach to understanding participation. Research by Nienhuis, van Dijk, and de Roo (2011) into resident participation in deprived areas of Arnhem, the Netherlands, highlight the importance of place attachment:

“ritualistic” participation is not the prime reason for people’s reluctance to participate – the strength of their commitment to the neighbourhood community is also significant. Accordingly, the more interest residents have in local matters, the more they participate (or are willing to participate) in projects to improve the quality of life and public security in their neighbourhoods. The lack of actual power to do so does not completely smother their urge to engage in community projects. (Nienhuis et al., 2011, p. 101).

A survey of residents in East Manchester found that respondents were more likely to explain their lack of participation in the local regeneration scheme because they had insufficient time (29%) or were not interested (26%) than because they believed it would make no difference (19%) (Blakeley & Evans, 2008). This does not necessarily mean that individuals are fundamentally uninterested in participation, but that perceptions of the project and other local factors may be shaping their view, rather than expectations of influence. The authors posit that those participating as consumers with a specific, self-interested aim may either opt out after their engagement or become more embedded in their local community as citizens and continue to participate without direct self-interest in doing so (Blakeley & Evans, 2009). Their continuum proposes that residents who are already embedded in their communities through previous engagement may participate more fully and for longer without aiming to fulfil individual goals.



The aim of the study presented in this article was to explore resident motivations for participation in housing regeneration which includes demolition. Such projects present an interesting arena in which to explore participation given that they have a direct, individual impact on residents through their relocation and the loss of their home, as well as a community impact such as the potential disruption or loss of existing social networks and changes to local facilities and shared spaces. The findings provide evidence for the existence of an influence fallacy amongst some policymakers, building upon the more nuanced explorations of participation presented above.

## Methods

The research presented in this article was conducted as part of a mixed methods study investigating the concept of trust in relation to resident participation in regeneration. This paper reports the qualitative findings on the influences which were found to shape residents' participatory behaviour.

### *Sampling Strategy*

A shortlist of 13 projects involving substantial neighbourhood demolition and redevelopment was drawn up from Internet searches, publications such as *Inside Housing* and websites such as Regeneration and Renewal (formerly regen.net, now incorporated into Placemaking Resource). Projects in their very early stages or near to completion were eliminated due to a potential lack of awareness or interest from residents respectively. Three projects were selected for the wider study and one forms the focus for this article.

### *The Regeneration Project*

The regeneration plans comprised the demolition of several hundred homes across two adjacent mixed-tenure estates and their replacement with a much larger number of new properties as well as a variety of new facilities. The local authority stated the project would offer benefits for residents of both the estates and wider local area, creating new homes, jobs, shops, community facilities, economic growth, increased local expenditure and a capital receipt to the council. The local authority promised to compensate and rehouse all council tenants directly into the new properties and to recompense homeowners. The decision to proceed with the redevelopment was taken during the period the research was conducted, after several years of discussion and consultation.

The council outlined its approach to engagement as focussing upon understanding residents' aspirations, concerns and needs, assessing the positive and negative aspects of the potential redevelopment and reaching consensus on assurances which would offer them protection. It sought to engage with residents through newsletters, a website, exhibitions of the plans and drop-in sessions at which the local authority aimed to answer questions and determine residents' worries and aspirations regarding the estates via its regeneration officers.

The local authority initially engaged the two TRAs on the estates. This combined group became opposed to the redevelopment and, with the assistance of an experienced community activist, organised petitions, protests and legal action against the local authority, arguing that the management of the estates should be transferred to a community-owned housing association. Further into the process a steering group was founded by former members of the TRAs after the local authority reported that it had been approached by a group of residents wishing to do so. The local authority described the



steering group's role as being to discuss the proposals with the council, resolve confusion over its details and to negotiate assurances for residents. It invited residents to join the group through newsletters and exhibitions and provided funding to the group to procure independent legal advice for the negotiations. The council stated that the steering group allowed it to engage with a range of residents. During the time in which the research was conducted the local authority underwent a consultation exercise with residents of the estates and the wider area. The results found that overall a small majority either objected to the plans or raised concerns. Most consultees living on the estates objected to the proposals. There was little evidence to suggest that the local authority saw the participatory opportunities, including the steering group, as mechanisms through which social capital or skills could be developed, instead focussing on the redevelopment project.

### Data collection

Nineteen semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 21 residents (Table 1). Eight of the interviews took place between October 2011 and January 2012, and were recruited via an involved member of the community and through my attendance at a TRA meeting. Eleven further interviews took place in October 2012, with two attended by two participants. The 11 lead participants were recruited via a questionnaire which had been distributed across the estates, to collect data for the quantitative element of the wider study. A shortlist of potential participants was developed partly based on responses to the extent of their previous participation. Of the 11 lead participants, three had engaged in both resident/TRA meetings and were members of the steering group, one was just a member of the steering group, three had engaged in resident/TRA meetings only, three had engaged in conversations with officers, and one had only attended an exhibition or drop in event and completed a questionnaire.

Participants were asked about their level of involvement in the project, the reasons behind their level of engagement, what factors could change this, and/or to what extent they planned, or were willing, to participate in the future. Participants were asked about a range of forms of participation, ranging from less active and individual activities to more involved and group-based engagement. The

**Table 1.** Participants.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age Category	Position on the Scheme
Tracey	Female	50–64	Against
Teresa	Female	Not recorded/provided	For
Tara	Female	50–64	Against
Sharon	Female	50–64	For
Gina	Female	40–49	Against
John	Male	30–39	Mostly against
Vincent	Male	40–49	For
Paisi	Female	40–49	Against
Nadia	Female	50–64	Against
Sameena	Female	30–39	Unsure
Sam	Male	40–49	Unsure
Indira	Female	Not recorded/provided	For
Nigel	Male	50–64	Unsure
Nicholas	Male	50–64	For
Chris	Male	65+	Against
Derek	Male	65+	Against
Geoff	Male	65+	Against
Kath	Female	Not recorded/provided	Against
Neven	Male	40–49	For
Bernadette	Female	40–49	For
Robert	Male	40–49	Unsure (more against)

interviews were audio recorded and transcribed bar one at the request of a participant. Participants were anonymised, provided with a pseudonym and had identifiable details removed from transcripts to uphold the participants' rights to confidentiality. An open coding approach was taken to the analysis of the transcripts, facilitated by Nvivo 10.

## Findings

Interviewees' participation was framed by hostility both between residents on the estates and toward the local authority. In addition, five motivations for participation emerged which it was helpful to separate into two groups: instrumental participation, concerning the pursuit of information or influence; and non-instrumental participation, which was not related to achieving specific goals but to notions of responsibility, identity and emotional factors.

### *A Divided 'Community'*

Large divisions developed both within the estates and between some residents and the local authority. Members of the TRAs recalled how when the project was first proposed the combined group took an oppositional stance toward the proposals. Several anti-redevelopment residents alleged that some members secretly met with the council. Having been persuaded of the merits of the scheme, several residents resigned from their positions within the TRAs and later developed the idea of a resident steering group for the project with the local authority.

This split created two camps: the anti-redevelopment TRA group and the broadly pro-redevelopment steering group. The former had concerns regarding the demolition of their homes, the large scale of the project and its long timeline. Some participants argued that the proposals represented an opportunity for the developers and local authority to benefit, rather than residents (all participants' names are pseudonyms):

key to all of this is that [the] value of communities is priceless but actually this is a sort of capitalist type arrangement, so they just aren't measuring quality really, it's quantity isn't it ... this is about money and nothing else. (Tara, female, 50–64)

Derek explained how his opposition to the scheme was based around his view that the local authority planned to sell off replacement social housing after the decanted tenants eventually vacated, on the basis that it would be of higher value than the existing stock, threatening the prospects of future working-class people.

Residents who were in favour of the proposals spoke of how they believed the estates were "falling apart", and what they saw as high service charges, insufficient concierge services, lack of social cohesion, poor local shops, crime and the social housing lettings policy which allowed "drug dealers, druggies, alcoholics" to rent properties. These participants were drawn to plans which they argued included a new home with fixtures and fittings, the potential capping of service charges for an initial period, a compensation payment, new job opportunities and the provision of facilities and shops which would "inject a whole new lease of life" into the area.

There was considerable hostility between the two camps. Participants who were opposed to the scheme stated that bullying phone calls were received around the time that residents formally split and accused the steering group of not exercising full transparency of their membership and funding sources. Some residents suggested that members of the steering group were naïve as to the ramifications of the plans and were putting themselves ahead of the wider interest of the estates. Rumours had

also circulated that the local authority had promised members of the steering group special treatment, which was denied by the council. Pro-redevelopment participants were critical of the TRA group for misleading others in order to advance their cause. They suggested that residents had been harassed into completing consultation documents criticising the scheme and children had been asked to sign on households' behalf.

Anti-redevelopment residents argued that literature produced by the local authority had presented negative portrayals of the estates and its residents, especially local authority tenants. The engagement strategy of the local authority was also accused of being a "tick box exercise" which did not genuinely seek to gather the views of residents. Tara argued that the job of regeneration officers was "to convince us that what they have already decided is going to be good for us" and described the residents as "pawns in a big man's game of chess". The local authority was also accused of trying to alter the composition of the estates via the regeneration plans to ensure more successful electoral outcomes for the incumbent party. The anti-redevelopment residents were associated with the opposition party and argued that there was little support for the incumbent party across the estates, which was therefore taking unrepresentative decisions. Steering group member Teresa argued that the hostility toward the scheme was predominantly the result of the political lens through which some residents saw it, "it's been attacked because it's [an incumbent party] redevelopment. If it wasn't ... the [TRAs] wouldn't be involved".

### *Instrumental Participation: Information and Influence*

#### *Participating to Know*

Participants' overriding response as to why they participated was to learn more about the proposals. Neven stated his reasons for attending drop-in meetings as follows:

First of all, to ... be informed personally ... that's the main point, so to know that there will be no ... mischiefs [*sic*] with the council and within the council ... we could even ask ... questions directly to ... the developers, what's going on, what are your thoughts and so on. (Neven, male, 40–49)

Residents referred to the same motivation for more intensive forms of participation. John voluntarily connected his desire for knowledge with his active participation in the TRAs:

Yes it's affecting me, I don't want to sit in ignorance ... I've been involved with the TRAs ... I've been involved in the petition ... we've done door knocking, so I've spoken to a lot of people on the estate ... I don't want to sit in ignorance ... and then suddenly have a letter saying this is what's happening and you're moving now ... I don't want that shock as it were. (John, male, 30–39)

Chris, who had also been actively involved in the TRAs, said that the organisations' opposition to the scheme would probably fail but that he intended to continue to participate because that was the best way to stay informed.

Indira recounted how one of the regeneration officers had shown interest in her becoming more actively involved in the scheme. Indira enquired about whether there were any jobs available in this regard, explaining that her language skills meant she had the potential to act as translator for some non-English speakers. She revealed her motivation thus:

So I like to [be] involve[d] in all this actually, I like to know ... the more you're involved, the more you can find out what is [officer's] ideas [laughs]. (Indira, female)

For many residents, there was a heavy backdrop of concern over the demolition of their homes which provoked a materialist response and motivated their desire to learn more. Self-interest tended to outweigh any social perspective or concerns over 'community' when participants discussed their desire to acquire more information. Steering group member Sharon stated that she would attend all future

meetings and exhibitions because she did not “want to miss anything that’s concerning my lodgings here”. Robert’s motivation for participation centred on gaining reassurance, given that his unwell parents would need to move. Several residents also spoke of the importance of engagement in allowing one to separate the truth from the rumours which had emerged because of the division over the project.

### *Participating to Influence*

Some interviewees referred to the opportunity that participation provided for achieving influence over the project. Both Teresa and Neven were heavily involved with the steering group and spoke of how their involvement had secured what they saw as a better deal for residents:

[We say] this is what we’d like to see, can you provide this for us, and the council is actually doing their best to talk to the developers and give us even more ... [of] what we want ... We just need to say, this is what we’d like to see ... but usually ... they come back and [say] yes [we’ve] done this for you ... (Neven, male, 40–49)

Neven cited changes to the financial compensation, the sizes of rooms in the new properties and ensuring like-for-like replacement of demolished homes as examples of how aspects of the project had improved because of the group’s influence. Teresa recounted how the local authority was committed to listening to the steering group:

they proposed ... to do Phase 1 and Phase 2 ... in a certain way ... We weren’t terribly happy with it ... so it’s been sent back to the drawing board ... and they’ve come back again and ... we’ve said no ... it’s still ... not good enough and so it’s gone back to the drawing board again. (Teresa, female)

For many of the residents opposed to the plans, the participatory opportunities afforded to the residents did not offer a genuine opportunity to influence the project:

[The local authority] are very biased ... it’s a bit like if you were researching to prove X, so all you did is look at the people who are going to give you the evidence and ignored the rest. (Tara, female, 50–64)

Anti-redevelopment residents argued that the local authority was only interested in hearing the views of the steering group, who were broadly in favour of the principle of redevelopment and were only attempting to influence what they saw as more trivial details. Whilst residents opposed to the plans spoke less of perceived influence being a factor in their engagement with the TRAs, some participants did suggest that the legal challenge they were attempting to bring against the local authority had the potential to stop the project. However, these residents argued that the local authority itself would not listen to them and change its policy, yet they remained active in organising protests, petitions and marshalling negative responses to the local authority consultation exercise.

### *Non-Instrumental Participation: Beyond Information and Influence*

The motivations for participation or non-participation in the project reported by some residents were not framed by instrumental success. Three themes of non-instrumental participation emerged: responsibilities; identities; and emotional factors.

### *Responsibilities*

Some residents implied that they saw participation, to some extent, as an end in itself; participating was the ‘right’ or ‘responsible’ behaviour, regardless of its impact. Nadia did not trust the council to listen to her views and believed that only the courts could prevent the project from going ahead, yet she stated that she would still complete a questionnaire should she receive one. When asked to explain her reasons for doing so she responded, “to record my protest”. For Nadia the filling in of the questionnaire to disparage the project was an act of protest which did not aim to bring about further consequences

but which was preferred in and of itself. Chris argued that even if involvement with the TRAs was not going to make any difference, he should still have been involved because “it’s my responsibility as a citizen”. Whilst Chris did row back from this slightly later in the interview, claiming that such activity could sometimes make a difference, he reasserted that it remained his duty to be involved, invoking the citizenship conceptualisation of participation.

Conversely, Bernadette implied that she did not consider it to be her responsibility to participate:

they said in the letter that I received ... they’re gonna have like officers coming round to explain ... I’m not gonna go to them ... Because I think if it’s their thing, they wanna move us so they should come to us and tell us what’s going on ... I’m not gonna go to them, so I’m just ... waiting to see if anybody does come round and see what they have to say. (Bernadette, female, 40–49)

The comments that “it’s their thing” and “move us” are very telling; influence appears to be entirely unthinkable. However, again, here it seems to be the case that residents are not refraining from actively participating because, for example, they believe participation would be pointless. It seems to be more that it should not have to be the residents who engage. For some residents participation and non-participation were questions of principle.

### *Identities*

When commenting on the proposals and their participation, some interviewees alluded to their identity and their perceptions of the character of other residents. Participants regularly spoke of the two “sides” and their membership. Some participants appeared keen to associate themselves with people who shared their view on the proposals without direct reference to the prospects of instrumental success. When asked why he did not attend steering group meetings, Derek simply stated “Because they don’t agree with us and we don’t agree with them”. Nicholas, who was in favour of the plans, recognised that the role of the steering group was to gather residents’ views but discussed his membership as if it was a club based on a shared interest rather than a group seeking influence:

[I joined because] I agree with ... everything [the steering group] said about [the plans] ... we’ve got [many] members now ... and some of the shops [are] members. But it’s just put down on paper, innit? Ones who agree with the regeneration ... it’s a good group that we’ve got ... they all want it redeveloped, all the steering group do. Just want to put our names on the paper, that’s all ... It’s just like ... an association innit? You ... have to put your name down ... so you’re a member of it. (Nicholas, male, 50–64)

Conversely, Nicholas described the anti-redevelopment TRAs as “the neighbourhood group that go ‘round with letters which are all lies”. Shared concerns regarding the plans framed John’s involvement with the TRAs:

I do trust the people who I’ve sat through [TRA] meetings with before ... They’re dedicated, they’re getting involved in the rest of it ... Around ... that meeting table ... there’s no crap, there’s no propaganda, there’s nothing. You get to learn what people’s ... true concerns are ... plus I know they’re in the same boat. (John, male, 30–39)

For some participants their view of other engaged residents went beyond their view on the plans and related to wider opinions and values:

There’ve always been people on that steering group ... who put themselves first. Every time. I don’t believe in doing that ... I’d say to them do you remember how you felt when you first got your ... keys to your council property ... How pleased you felt about it. That’ll never happen here, there’ll never be another council tenant in your [new] place when you die ... You’ll be the first and the last one in there. (Derek, male, 65+)

Activity in the TRA was also framed by what participants saw as a stigmatising narrative promulgated by the local authority:

there's this whole perception of everyone that's on the council estate is there because they're either thick or they're stupid or they're poor or they're just not really involved in society as much, so we can pick them up and put them anywhere we want to. (John, male, 30–39)

Some participants drew attention to specific comments made by one of the council members which allegedly implied that local authority tenants were not “decent people” or “normal human beings”, as well as the literature produced by the council which highlighted problems with the estates.

Several participants opposed to the redevelopment reported frustration at the residents who had left the TRAs to set up the steering group and discussed how they were too easily convinced of the merits of the scheme and focussed on what other residents saw as minor material considerations:

It was one resident and the kind of people she attracted ... that put me off being actively engaged with the early meetings ... I felt that [the resident] wasn't canny enough to deal with ... the council and the developers and then ... [the resident] went over to their side ... and then started telling people ... that everyone is being promised new carpets, new ... white goods, curtains ... it's like come on! (Tracey, female, 50–64)

John summed up what he saw as the difference between the two groups:

Some people can see as far as an extra bedroom, some people can see as far as their bank account and how that's going to get bettered but everyone's got a different situation and everyone has to address what this move means to them. To me I've got a ... two bed flat in an area that I've lived in my whole life and grew up in [and] I'm a short walk from all these wonderful areas around. I've got transport coming out of my ears ... [and] my own parking space. (John, male, 30–39)

### *Emotional Factors*

Some participants commented on an emotional dimension to their participation. Kath and her husband Geoff had lived in their property for several decades and opposed the demolition plans. Kath very briefly explained why she did not attend TRA meetings: “I don't go up there, I get too emotional ... It's very sad to me”. Kath's disagreement with the project and her attachment to her home made it hard for her to discuss the issue. Robert refrained from attending steering group meetings because of the unease he felt in certain environments:

I'm kind of half tempted to go just to see what they're saying but ... I don't think I'm very good with groups of people anyway ... [I'll] go to the meetings and probably not say anything at all whereas some kind of drop-in, just a one-on-one ... if I can get somebody's attention then I can kind of ask the questions. (Robert, male, 40–49)

Bernadette commented similarly:

I mean why am I gonna go there and just make a prat of myself ... I wanna go to this meeting ... just to see what's going on, but speak I won't speak. (Bernadette, female, 40–49)

For Kath, it was the topic which made her feel upset whereas Robert and Bernadette had an emotional response to the nature of the participation and their perceived lack of confidence in this arena. Such responses were unsurprising given the level of hostility between residents over the plans.

Robert was also motivated to attend another session because of his feelings. He explained that he had attended a drop-in session but, despite believing that residents could not exhibit any influence, still gave his opinion to the officers. When asked why, he said it was perhaps due to a “bit of anger”:

even though I was always very polite with them ... yeah a bit of anger and hurt maybe ... 'cause my parents are elderly ... and they've got medical issues ... [to] let [the officer] know that an individual person has ... questions, [I didn't] say that I thought the whole thing was just nonsense ... I just wish it wasn't happening. (Robert, male, 40–49)

This allowed Robert to ‘vent’, regardless of successful influence.



## Discussion

This article has explored a variety of motivations for residents' participation and non-participation in a housing regeneration project. Whilst influence was identified as a motivation for some residents, a variety of factors lay behind other participants' behaviour. A consumerist pursuit of knowledge was central to many residents' motivations for minor and occasionally major engagement in the scheme (Cairncross et al., 1997; Hickman, 2006). It was based upon an emotional, materialist concern as to what would happen to their own homes and driven by the need for reassurance. In addition, the article also presented a distinct group of motivations which were fundamentally non-instrumental in nature, underpinned by perceived responsibilities, identities and emotions. Residents' decision-making over participation in these instances was linked to their perception of what they thought of as 'right', their own sense of self or how they felt about the project or participation, rather than what they expected engagement to achieve.

Despite the limitation of a relatively small sample size, the research demonstrates how residents' motivations for engagement are not necessarily based on expectations of influencing projects and that citizens can continue to participate whilst actively believing that their involvement will make little difference. Whilst for some residents perceived influence was sufficient for them to participate, it was not necessary for engagement to occur. The findings therefore challenge the dominant assumption that participation inherently depends upon perceived efficacy of engagement regardless of local factors, and presents evidence for a decontextualised influence fallacy amongst policymakers (Cameron, 2011; DCLG, 2012; ODPM, 2005). Previous research which has challenged this assumption has identified commitment to the neighbourhood community and interest in local matters as factors which influence participation (Nienhuis et al., 2011). The present study advances these findings by demonstrating how other factors intimately connected to the specific features of the regeneration project, perceptions of the local authority and its approach, and the deep divisions amongst residents can also influence whether, how and why local people engage.

Whilst it would be difficult to describe the participation of residents explored in the study as a movement, social movement theory is a useful analytical tool for understanding the non-instrumental motivations identified and the way participatory opportunities developed on the estates. The TRAs sought to organise themselves in opposition to the scheme, partly as a reaction against the demolition of their homes but also against a discourse which they perceived as stigmatising the estates, the residents and social housing as a concept (Bradley, 2012) and promoting the interests of the historically distrusted incumbent political party. The TRAs developed as a counter-public with an alternative discourse which rejected the principle that improvement of the estate depended upon redevelopment and instead promoted transfer of the management of the estates to a community housing association as a superior option. Whilst some of the participants refrained from joining the steering group because of the restricted influence it offered, they admitted that much of their activity within the TRA would make little difference, with the expression of the collective identity they developed empowering in and of itself (Nienhuis et al., 2011).

TRA members unhappy with this approach withdrew to form a second, 'thinner' counter-public based around opposition to the plans of the TRAs and what they saw as the promotion of a purposely distorted interpretation of the redevelopment which had its roots in party-political loyalties. In a departure from social movement theory, this group was created out of opposition toward another counter-public and in support of (some) of the discourse promulgated by the existing power structure of the local authority. The group thus sought legitimacy from the local authority and, despite having



been developed and run by residents, became the officially promoted invited space for deliberative participation in the project.

The steering group operated with alternative norms to the TRAs, setting the agenda for participation within the consumerist boundaries of how the project would be managed and what residents would receive as opposed to how the estates could be improved more generally. The more involved participants were motivated by their perceived influence. Others saw it as an association which demonstrated and reinforced their own view of the plans or merely formed a channel through which they could receive official updates on the project to cut through the propaganda which had developed. Whilst membership was open to residents living on the estates, the group was perceived as being broadly supportive of the project. The members of the steering group became the constituted public of the local authority (Barnes et al., 2004), offering access to what they argued were residents with a range of views. The support for the steering group by the local authority can be seen as an attempt at allowing residents influence over some of the finer details of how the plans are implemented in exchange for some perceived legitimacy generated for the redevelopment. They arguably became durable citizens, with an ability to engage but not shape the space in which participation took place, which was instead moulded by the non-local developers and politicians who practised flexible citizenship (Lepofsky & Fraser, 2003). In contrast the TRA members became the non-citizens who challenged the legitimacy of the steering group, but who themselves were assisted by a flexible citizen in the form of a community activist from outside the area.

In addition to challenging the notion of perceived influence as a fundamental motivation for participation, the study makes two contributions to social movement theory. First, whilst the formation of collective identities has been explored as the dominant way counter-publics develop (Barnes et al., 2007; Bradley, 2012; Fraser, 1997), there has been little consideration of the notions of responsibility and duty and their potential role in motivating and sustaining participation in these groups. Secondly, the development of counter-publics has generally been explored with regard to their opposition to existing power structures, rather than their support for them alongside hostility toward another counter-public. Further research could explore how some groups seek out incorporation by official bodies to mutually enforce the legitimacy of one another.

The evidence from this research also has important ramifications for regeneration officers and planners working on housing redevelopment projects who wish to generate engagement from residents. The previous assumption has been that people actively want to influence decision-making, and that engagement will increase if policymakers and planners: reduce the complexity of the participation or planning processes, decrease the imposition of targets and central monitoring, and devolve greater power to communities (Cameron, 2011; DCLG, 2012; Innes & Booher, 2004; Lawson & Pearson, 2012; ODPM, 2005). The study demonstrates that this decontextualised approach may not be sufficient. Some residents may be uninterested in participating no matter how much influence is offered, preferring to seek information or refrain due to the emotional challenges of the topic and divisions among the local population. This does not mean that genuine channels of influence over projects should be avoided. Instead, it is important that professionals recognise that such opportunities do not exist within a social or historical vacuum. Officers and planners should be mindful of the discourses promoted by organisations and political parties which can create a social environment from which some residents may wish to distance themselves. Without neutralising or reversing divisive narratives, professionals' attempts to generate participation through genuine empowerment may be stymied by residents who refrain from engaging in groups which represent a discourse they perceive as inconsistent with their own identity. Instead, professionals have a central role to play in the development of an inclusive and

nuanced representation of the people regeneration projects seek to help and the places where they live in order to maximise their contributions and generate social cohesion rather than division.

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